

ISSN:0976-8165

THE CRITERION

An International Journal in English



Vol. 7, Issue-I February 2016

7 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

www.the-criterion.com

Editor-In-Chief: Dr. Vishwanath Bite

About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

Culturally Ornate Stories of Tagore: *The Victory* and *Once there was a King*

Dr. Vikas Jaollkar

Professor and Head
Dept. of English
Govt. Hamidia P.G. College
Bhopal (M.P.)

&

Pooja Bhatia

Research Scholar
Dept. of English
Barkatullah University
Bhopal (M.P.)

India is a land of culture and tradition. It has variety of people living together on the same land symbolizing 'Unity in Diversity'. Indian culture is an amalgam of manners, etiquettes, values, customs, arts, handicrafts, music, dance etc. Even though Indians have accepted modernization practices, culture is still an important part of its civilization. It is very important for Indian students to know about their Indian culture as they come from different families, castes and religious communities. Knowing about others culture and tradition creates respect for other communities in the minds of students. It helps them to live peacefully and conjointly in a group. Keeping this point of view, the researcher scrutinizes the stories of Tagore to get a peek into the customs, traditions, values and folkways of Indian civilization. The stories of Tagore can be fruitful for Indian students to get an insight of Indian culture. The researcher has taken two stories- *The Victory* and *Once there was a King* from the oeuvre of Tagore for this study. Both the stories are rich with nuances of Indian culture

Introduction:

India's culture is among the world's oldest civilization. A country as diverse as India emblemizes plural form of culture. Culture can be defined as a set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices. It plays a vital role in the development of any nation. It helps a person to connect to the community he lives in and understand it in a better way. Culture is necessary for the development of a society. Only culture helps to create a society with traditions, values and norms. Culture includes social organization, customs and traditions, religion, language, art and literature, cuisine, clothing, greetings etc. Tagore's short stories are an amalgam of these characteristics giving the readers a luscious treat of Indian culture. His stories are a peek into the customs, traditions, values, folkways of Indian civilization.

One of his stories, "The Victory" is an example of this trait of Tagore. The story is about King Narayan and his court poet Shekhar. Tagore here refers to the tradition in Indian kingdoms to have a court poet appointed for the entertainment of the king. Shekhar had an infatuation for princess Ajita though he had never seen her physically. He had only seen her shadow 'moving behind the veil' (Tagore: 2002, 20) and tinkle of her anklets 'whose tiny golden bells sang at each step' (20) 'in the screened balcony high above the hall' (20). Tagore here refers to one of

the ornaments of dressing of Indian women i.e. the anklets. Indian women prefer to adorn themselves with earrings, bangles, anklets etc. Also they covered their heads in a veil in front of other men and strangers. Tagore also referred to the close area in the court where the royal women- queen, princesses and other royalties used to sit.

Shekhar used to recite his poems in the court and get appreciation of one and all. When he recited his new poem, he would raise his voice a little to be heard to his veiled admirer in the balcony of the court. Here Tagore mentions about the classical Hindustani music which was born out of amalgamation of Vedic chant tradition, various external influences and native folk traditions. It was generally accompanied by conch (shankh), lute (veena) and flute (bansuri).

Shekhar would cherish the image of moving of the shadow of the lady he adored secretly and the tinkling of her anklets and it served as an inspiration for him in composing his songs. Manjari, the maid of the princess, posed as the princess, visited the poet's house. These meetings were sheer joy for the poet and he would call the dame 'Spray of Spring Flowers.'(21)

Once a poet, named Pundarik, came from the south and sang verses in the praise of King Narayan. He challenged the court poet of King Narayan. His track record was unbeatable in other kingdoms and his verses surpassed poets of other courts. The competition began the next day. Shekhar could not beat the unsurpassable skill of the court poet Pundarik and accepted his defeat. Everyone applauded Pundarik's feat and the king descended from his throne and awarded him a pearl chain. Here Tagore cites the attribute of a king common at the time of early Indian monarchy. A king used to endow gifts on the person whom he was very pleased with.

After his embarrassment at the court, Shekhar was very much agonized and he burnt all his possessions of books. At night, he even drank the juice of some poisonous root to end his life and lay on the bed. Here Tagore brings to the notice of readers the quality of people of early time to know about the characteristic features of the herbs and roots and take them accordingly.

At that moment, Shekhar heard the familiar sound of tinkle of the bells. He called out- "My lady, have you taken pity upon your servant at last and come to see him?"(29) The lady was princess Ajita herself and she answered- "My poet, I have come."(29) Princess Ajita had come to rectify the wrong done by the king. In her eyes, Shekhar was victorious in the competition between him and Pundarik. She took out the garland around her neck and placed it around the poet's neck. At that poison showed its effect and the poet fell down dead. Thus Tagore pens down a story colored by shades of Indian culture.

One another story of Tagore "Once there was a King" can be read to enjoy nuances of Indian culture. At the outset of the story, Tagore gives a critical analysis of the beginning to a fable i.e. with 'Once there was a king'. Tagore argues that in earlier age of ignorance of children such type of simple beginnings to the fable were acceptable but in modern age of curiosity, the children want to know who the king was or what the name of his kingdom was.

The story is about Calcutta. It was evening time and was raining heavily. The author, a boy of seven, hoped the rain would continue so that he could elude his tuitions at home. Here Tagore mentions the culture of homeschooling or private education of children at home which was a common feature of children belonging to affluent families in India. Though the rain continued, the tutor came at the usual time to the disappointment of the author. Then he thought

of another way to evade his tuitions for that day. He went to his mother's room. His mother and his grandmother 'were sitting opposite one another playing cards by the light of a lamp'. (Tagore: 2002, 34) Tagore here mentioned a custom followed by the women of well-to-do families. The women used to play cards to while away their time. He requested his mother- "Mother dear, the tutor has come, and I have such a bad headache; couldn't I have no lessons to-day?"(34) And his mother succumbed to his request and he got the evening off.

The author pretended to have great pain in the head for sometime but after sometime started pestering his grandmother to tell him a story. His mother told him not to disturb -"Child, don't bother. Wait till we have finished our game."(35) But he did not heed to her and cajoled his grandmother to narrate a story to him. At last his mother gave in and they stopped playing cards. His granny started a story about a king who had a queen and a daughter but no son. The king longed for a son and he went to the forest 'to practise austerities in order to get a son'.(36) Tagore here talks about the custom prevalent during Vedic age when people used to go to forest for practicing austerity (tapas) to gain knowledge to be born into a better world after death or to be liberated from rebirth.

Many years passed by and the king did not return. In the meantime, his daughter grew of marriageable age. The queen was worried about her marriage and so she sent for the king to at least come and have a meal at home to which he agreed. The queen prepared the food herself. She served the food to the king in gold and silver plates and his daughter fanned him with a 'peacock-tail fan'.(37) Tagore here mentions about the Indian custom of housewives to prepare food with their own hands. He also mentions about the custom of use hand fans in earlier times when electricity was not invented.

The king was surprised to see the young lady fanning him and enquired about her- "Pray, who is this girl whose beauty shines as the gold image of the goddess? Whose daughter is she?"(37) The queen told him that she was his own daughter. Then the king asked the queen why she had married her off. She replied that as he was away she was unable to find her a suitable groom. Then the king pledged to get her married with the first man he would see the next day.

The next day, the king saw a Brahmin boy of seven years. He was collecting sticks in the forest. As promised, the king decided to get him married off to his daughter. The king tied the knot of his daughter, dressed prettily and adorned with all the ornaments, with the boy. Tagore here refers to the Indian custom of a bride to embellish herself with ornaments at the time of marriage.

The princess, though disappointed, took her groom away and 'built a large palace with seven wings' (39) She took care of him. The boy started going to school. His schoolmates asked him curiously about the beautiful lady who lived with him-'Who is that beautiful lady who lives with you in the palace with the seven wings?'(39). But the boy knew nothing about it as he was too small at the time to understand about his wedding. He asked his inmate about herself but she said she would tell him someday. Many years passed by and the boy kept repeating his question to which he got the same answer every time.

Once, when this question became unforbearing for the boy, he cautioned the princess by saying -"If you do not tell me to-day who you are, O beautiful lady, I will leave this palace with the seven wings.' (40) The princess promised him to tell him everything the next day after

dinner. The next day, the boy was too excited to have his dinner. He went to his bedroom and just as the princess went to him to reveal the secret, she found he was bitten by the serpent and lying dead. The grandmother telling the story ended it abruptly by saying the body of the boy was floated in the river in the traditional way with 'some incantations read by the magician'.(42) Tagore here refers to the Hindu custom of reading holy texts by the priests while cremating the body of a dead person. After the story ended, the author felt really sleepy and went to sleep.

Conclusion: - Tagore was expert in the art of storytelling. He wove his stories around simple and realistic characters. His stories are a mirror of Indian culture and civilization. They can be very useful for the Indian students in understanding humanity as a whole. In the era of modernization, the Indian students can form a different perspective if exposed to the culture as very much evident in stories of Tagore.

Works Cited:

A Centenary Volume: Rabindranath Tagore 1861-1961. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy P, 1961. Print.

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 7th ed. New Delhi: Affiliated East-West Press, 2009. Print.

Roy, Madhumita. *Scripting Women in Three Short Stories of Tagore*. Diss. Visva-Bharati, 2010. Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities, Vol 2 (2010): 596-604. Web.

Tagore, Rabindranath. *Hungry Stones and Other Stories*. New Delhi: Rupa P India. 2002. Print.